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ABSTRACT

A study examined communication between special educators and the regular classroom teachers to whom they mainstream students. Respondents to a survey questionnaire included 34 special education teachers employed by a special education cooperative, 25 special educators employed by individual school districts, and 84 regular classroom teachers. The extent of communication which took place in four areas was examined: (1) communication and consultation; (2) demonstration of materials, techniques, and teaching methods for exceptional children; (3) development of goals and instructional objectives; and (4) provision of inservice training by special educators for regular classroom teachers. Responses to the questionnaires indicated: (1) Special educators employed by the school districts were more actively sharing material with regular educators on a more regular basis than those employed by the cooperative, but regular teachers' perceptions of sharing were at a much lower level; (2) District special educators reported being more involved than cooperative educators in discussions of techniques and teaching methods, but once again, regular classroom teachers reported less involvement with all special educators; (3) Regular classroom teachers reported less attendance to objective-setting meetings than did the special educators; and (4) The majority of both regular classroom educators and special educators responded negatively concerning the presentation of formal inservice training. (JD)

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# COMMUNICATION BETWEEN

# SPECIAL EDUCATORS AND REGULAR EDUCATORS

A paper presented at
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# COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SPECIAL EDUCATORS AND REGULAR EDUCATORS

Since the enactment of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, the special educator has been responsible for working with regular classroom teachers. One of the primary communication concerns of special education teachers involves the integration of special education students into regular classrooms (i.e., mainstreaming). The progress a special education student makes while mainstreamed can hinge upon the close communication of the special educator and the regular classroom teacher.

Both the federal law and the Illinois Rules and Regulations to govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education require an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) to contain the extent to which the special education student will be mainstreamed into the regular classes. According to the Illinois Rules and Regulations, "When a student is integrated into a standard educational program from a special program, the special teacher of that student shall be responsible for the intensive coordination with the standard program teacher" (p.5).

"The regular classroom teacher will not replace specialist teachers of exceptional pupils, rather the two will work closely together. . .to identify, plan for, guide, instruct and evaluate the progress of exceptional pupils" (Wasserman, 1979, p.7). For successful mainstreaming to take place, it is imperative to". . . have teacher participation in prescriptive teaching or programming" (Cain, 1976, p.95).

The facets included in the communication/consultation between regular classroom teachers and special education teachers regarding mainstreamed students deal with the following areas which have been suggested as vital by past literature: (1) communication/consultation between regular classroom teachers and special education teachers regarding mainstreamed students deal with the following areas which have been suggested as vital by past literature: (1) communication/consultation of regular teachers with special educators regarding mainstreamed students (McKenzie, 1976; Todd & Lazear, 1979); (2) demonstration of materials, techniques and methods of teaching exceptional children (Wasserman, 1979, Daly, 1979); (3) goal, IEP and instructional objective development by the regular and special education teachers (Roubinek, 1978; Blankenship, 1977); (4) provision of in-service training for regular classroom teachers by the special educators (Daly, 1979; Vandivier and Vandivier, 1979; Hanley, 1979; Todd and Lagear, 1979).

At this point in time, it is not known what quality of communication is taking place among the various trained teachers who are responsible for facilitating the education of special-needs children. In an earlier study of special educators' communication, Cornwall and Nickas (1980) found that communication between special educators and regular classroom teachers was limited or nonexistent. They reported that the majority of regular teachers did not attend staffings, nor participate in development of goals, objectives, or strategies. It is the

purpose of this study to examine the perceptions of the communication which is carried on between the special educators and the regular classroom teachers to whom they mainstream students. In this descriptive study, the extent to which communication in the cited four areas took place among and between special and regular educators was examined.

## Method

### Subjects

The accidental sample of this study included fifty (59) special education teachers and eighty-four (84) regular classroom teachers. All participants teach in school districts located in suburban areas of Chicago.

Thirty-four (34) of the special education teachers are employed by a special education cooperative. The cooperative services twelve (12) school districts. Within the cooperative special education teachers' group, twenty-three (23) are special educators teaching in self-contained programs, and eleven (11) are special educators teaching in resource programs. Twenty-five (25) of the special educators are not employed by cooperatives, but are employed by individual districts. Within this group, eleven (11) teach in self-contained programs and fourteen (14) are in resource programs.

The eighty-four (84) regular classroom teachers are employed by school districts who are not serviced by the special education cooperative. They are employed by the districts that employ their own special educators, however, twenty-eight (28) of this group do not serve special education students and were unable to answer some of the questions.

Instrumentation

Two parallel survey forms were developed by these researchers to determine the existence of communication in the four suggested areas (See Appendices A and B). One survey form was directed to the Special Educators. It contained eleven (11) questions. The responses to the first four questions were informational, while responses to questions five through eleven related to the four areas of communication. The other survey form was directed to the Regular Classroom Teachers. It contained twelve (12) questions. The responses to the first three (3) questions were informational, while the responses to questions four (4) through twelve (12) related to the four areas of communication.

The educators answered the questions by making a check mark, filling in a number, or circling "yes" or "no". The surveys were kept brief to ensure completion by the subjects. They were color coded; green for special educators and yellow for regular educators.

## Procedure

The research project was explained to the Director of the Special Education Cooperative, the Superintendent of one of the involved school districts, and the principals of the other school districts. These individuals arranged for distribution and collection of the survey forms in their areas. Completion of the surveys by the teachers was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity was assured since no identifying data was required on the forms, with the exception of the teacher's area and level of teaching. The investigators received the completed survey forms from their contact person in the cooperative and one district. In the other district, the researchers or the principal distributed and collected the surveys.

The answers given by the educators were grouped according to content. Differences and similarities were identified and compared.

## Results

The response to the question, "Have you been able to communicate with regular teachers regarding the needs and progress of your mainstreamed special education students?" is: All of the District Special Educators responded "yes". All except three (3) of the Cooperative Special Educators also responded affirmatively. Of the three exceptions, one responded "no" and two did not respond at all.

In response to the question for Regular Educators, "Has the Special Education teacher communicated with you regarding the needs and progress of their mainstreamed special education students," forty-three (43), or 51%, responded "yes", while twenty-six (26), or 31%, responded "no". The remaining fifteen (15), or 18% of the teachers, did not respond. Apparently the Special Educators view their communication with the regular classroom teachers more positively than the classroom teachers do.

The two types of communication initiated and the frequency of the communication is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Special Educators' Sharing Materials with Regular Teachers for Special Education Students:

| Frequency of Sharing | District Educators | | Cooperative |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Special | Regular | Special Educators |
| More than weekly | 24% | 5% | 9% |
| Weekly | 28% | 10% | 24% |
| Twice a Month | 16% | 8% | 12% |
| Monthly | 4% | 7% | 0% |
| Less than Monthly | 28% | 24% | 43% |
| No Response | 0% | 46% | 12% |
| TOTALS | 100% | 100% | 100% |

The Special Educators employed by the Districts appear to be more actively sharing materials with Regular Educators on a regular basis

than the Special Educators employed by the Cooperative. However, the Regular Teachers' perception of the sharing is at a much lower level.

Table 2

Special Educators' Discussion of Techniques and Methods for the Special Education Students:

| Frequency of Discussion | District Educators | | Cooperative Special Educators |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Special | Regular | |
| More than Weekly | 28% | 4% | 12% |
| Weekly | 16% | 12% | 18% |
| Twice a Month | 20% | 5% | 18% |
| Monthly | 12% | 12% | 6% |
| Less than Monthly | 24% | 25% | 34% |
| No Response | 0% | 42% | 12% |
| TOTAL | 100% | 100% | 100% |

The District Special Educators again report being more involved than the Cooperative Special Educators in discussion of techniques and methods for use with the Special Education students by the Regular Classroom Teachers. However, once again, the Regular classroom teachers report less involvement than the Special Educators.

The responses to the questions concerning the presence of regular educators at the multi-disciplinary staffing of mainstreamed students are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Presence of Regular Teachers at Staffings for Mainstreamed Special Education Students:

| Frequency of Presence | District Educators | | Cooperative Special Educators |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Special | Regular | |
| All the time | 32% | 13% | 24% |
| Most of the time | 28% | 6% | 18% |
| Half of the time | 4% | 2% | 3% |
| Less than half of the time | 12% | 1% | 6% |
| Never | 24% | 39% | 37% |
| No Response | 0% | 39% | 12% |
| TOTAL | 100% | 100% | 100% |

The contrast is striking between the 19% of the Regular Educators who report being present at staffings all or most of the time and the 60% which the District Special Educators report, or the 42% which the Cooperative Special Educators report.

The responses to the questions concerning the presence of regular teachers at the Annual Review of mainstreamed students are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Presence of Regular Teachers at the Annual Review for Mainstreamed Special Education Students.

| Frequency of Presence | District Educators | | Cooperative Special Educators |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Special | Regular | |
| All of the time | 20% | 12% | 24% |
| Most of the time | 24% | 2% | 15% |
| Half of the time | 4% | 1% | 3% |
| Less than half of the time | 28% | 4% | 6% |
| Never | 20% | 39% | 39% |
| No Response | 4% | 42% | 12% |
| TOTALS | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Once again, there is a striking contrast between the Regular Educators report of being present at Annual Reviews of mainstreamed special education students. They report their presence all or most of the time at 14%, whereas the District Special Educators report their being present all or most of the time at a 44% level, and the Cooperative Special Educators report it at a slightly lower 39%, which is still nearly three times the report of the Regular Educators.

The responses to the questions concerning the participation of regular teachers in the development of goals and objectives are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Participation of Regular Teachers in the Development of Annual Goals and Short-term Objectives for Mainstreamed Students:

| | Annual Goals | | | Short Term Objectives | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers | Yes | No | No Response | Yes | No | No Response |
| Special Educators | | | | | | |
| District | 28% | 68% | 4% | 32% | 64% | 4% |
| Cooperative | 62% | 21% | 18% | 56% | 26% | 18% |
| Regular Educators | | | | | | |
| District | 15% | 39% | 45% | 20% | 35% | 45% |

The Cooperative Special Educators appear to be having Regular classroom teachers participate in the development of goals and objectives at nearly twice the rate of the District Special Educators, yet, once again, the Regular Educators report a much lower level of participation.

The responses to the questions concerning formal in-service training or workshops by Special Educators for regular classroom teachers are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Formal In-service Training or Workshops Presented by Special Educators for Regular Classroom Teachers:

| Subject of Presentation | District Educators: Special Yes | Special No | Regular Yes | Regular No | No Resp. | Cooperative Special Educators: Yes | No | N.R. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Characteristics of Handicapped Children | 24% | 76% | 23% | 62% | 15% | 6% | 88% | 6% |
| Development of Goals and/or I.E.P.s | 4% | 96% | 12% | 67% | 21% | 6% | 88% | 6% |
| Development of Short Term Instructional Objectives and Implementation Strategies | 4% | 96% | 10% | 67% | 23% | 3% | 88% | 9% |

The vast majority of both Regular and Special Educators respond negatively concerning the presentation of formal in-service training or workshops, although in this instance, the Special Educators are more negative than the Regular Educations. When asked about their attendance at workshops, the regular educators responded in the following way:

| | |
|---|---|
| 19% | Yes |
| 38% | No, the special educators have not provided |
| 4% | No, other commitments |
| 2% | No, I was not interested |
| 37% | No response |

The responses to the questions concerning special educators' explanations and provision of case study reports to regular classroom teachers of the special education children in their classrooms are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Special Educators' Provision of Explanation of Problems and Case Studies of Mainstreamed Children to Regular Classroom Educators:

| Action | Special Educators: Cooperative Yes | Cooperative No | Cooperative N.R. | District Yes | District No | District N.R. | Regular Educators Yes | Regular Educators No | Regular Educators N.R. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Problems of Mainstreamed Children | | | | | | | | | |
| Explained | 67% | 18% | 15% | 92% | 8% | 0% | | | |
| Received Explanation | | | | | | | 46% | 26% | 27% |
| Special Education Case Study Reports | | | | | | | | | |
| Provided | 50% | 41% | 9% | 40% | 52% | 8% | | | |
| Received | | | | | | | 23% | 52% | 25% |
| Presented | 24% | 67% | 9% | 32% | 60% | 8% | | | |
| Received Presentation | | | | | | | 14% | 46% | 39% |
| Available | 85% | 6% | 9% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 42% | 10% | 48% |
| Read | | | | | | | 24% | 42% | 35% |

Once more, the Special Educators are reporting much more active provision of explanations and case studies than Regular Teachers report receiving. The latter group report about half the amount of activity reported by the two Special Educator groups.

The responses to the questions concerning regular classroom teachers seeking help or information from the special education teachers concerning the mainstreamed child's educational program are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Regular Classroom Teachers Seeking Help or Information from Special Education Teachers:

| | Regular Educators Initiated Action | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Group | Yes | No | No Response |
| Special Educators | | | |
| Cooperative | 65% | 20% | 15% |
| District | 88% | 12% | 0% |
| Regular Educators | 46% | 19% | 35% |

It is interesting to note that the Special Educators again perceive much more interaction initiated by the Regular Educators than the Regular Educators perceive.

## Discussion

Ninety-six (96) percent of the special educators indicated that they did communicate with regular teachers regarding the needs and progress of their mainstreamed special education students. Fifty-one (51) percent of the regular classroom teachers indicated that special education teachers did indeed communicate with them. This contrast continued to be evident when each of the groups were asked to specify the type and frequency of communication which they experienced.

However, the communication which is currently taking place has increased since the 1980 study by Cornwall and Nickas. At that time, nineteen (19) percent of the special educators shared materials with regular educators on a weekly or more than weekly basis. In the current study, the cooperative special educators share on a weekly or more than weekly basis thirty-three (33) percent of the time, while the district special educators report this fifty-two (52) percent of the time.

The discussion of techniques and methods for use with mainstreamed students was reported on a weekly or more than weekly basis twenty-two (22) percent of the time in the Cornwall-Nickas 1980 study. Today the cooperative special educators report this thirty (30) percent of the time and the district special educators report this forty-four (44) percent of the time. In the same study, the presence of regular educators at

staffings for mainstreamed special education students all or most of the time was reported at a twenty-six (26) percent level, whereas today cooperative special educators are reporting all or most of the time at a forty-two (42) percent level and the district special educators are reporting all or most of the time at a sixty (60) percent level. When the "never" and "less than half of the time" responses are compared, seventy-four (74) percent of the 1980 group respond at those levels; however, in the current study, forty-four (44) percent of the cooperative special educators and thirty-six (36) percent of the district special educators report these levels of involvement. These changes may simply be a result of different subjects responding to the questionnaires or, hopefully, it reflects a greater awareness and understanding of the needs of special education students.

## Implications

Throughout this study, the most obvious contrast with implications for change is between the district special educators and the cooperative special educators. In every area of communication which was selected by review of the literature and examined in this study, the district special educator showed a higher frequency of communication in all areas in spite of the fact that the regular educators did not perceive it similarly. Due to this, it is felt that district sponsored special education programs are more effective in encouraging communication between

special and regular educators. This may be encouraged because the educators feel more of a sense of comraderie since they share responsibility for the same students and are employed by the same district.

Since the communication is perceived differently by the special and regular educators, there may be a need for further investigation to determine:

1. How the perceived differences can be eliminated.
2. How in service training might be used more effectively.
3. What interests and needs the regular educators have which the special educators can address.
4. The appropriate number of students which any one special educator can effectively service while adequately communicating with the involved regular educators.
5. Whether students receiving minimal direct service from special educators would be better served by the special educator working directly with the regular educator rather than with the child.

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# APPENDIX A

## SURVEY

1. Are you a regular (as opposed to special education) classroom teacher? yes no

2. At what level do you teach?

   K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

3. Are any of your students mainstreamed special education students? yes no

   If yes, how many of your students are mainstreamed? _____

4. Has the special education teacher communicated with you regarding the needs and progress of your mainstreamed special education students? yes no

   If yes, please check the types of communication initiated this school year and how often they occurred.

   A. Has the special education teacher shared materials with you for use with mainstreamed special education students?

      _____weekly _____twice a month _____monthly

      _____more frequently than any of the above

      _____less frequently than any of the above

   B. Has the special education teacher discussed with you the methods and techniques for use with special education students

      _____weekly _____twice a month _____monthly

      _____more frequently than any of the above

      _____less frequently than any of the above

   C. Are you present at the multi-disciplinary staffing of your special education students?

      _____all of the time _____less than half of the time

      _____most of the time _____never

      _____half of the time

   D. Are you present at the annual review of your special education students?

      _____all of the time _____less than half of the time

      _____most of the time _____never

      _____half of the time

E. For your mainstreamed students, do you participate in the development of:

a) annual goals yes no

b) short-term goals yes no

5. Has the special education teacher provided formal in-service training or workshops for you regarding:

A. characteristics of handicapped children yes no

_____number of presentations

B. development of annual goals and/or I.E.P.s? yes no

_____number of presentations

C. development of short-term instructional objectives and implementation strategies yes no

_____number of presentations

6. Have you attended?

_____Yes

_____No, the special educators have not provided such training.

_____No, I had other commitments.

_____No, I was not interested.

7. Did the special educator explain to you the special problems of the mainstreamed special education children in your classroom? yes no

8. Have you been provided with the special education case study report? yes no

9. Was it presented by a special educator? yes no

10. Was it available in the files? yes no

11. Did you read the report? yes no

12. Have you sought help or information regarding the mainstreamed child's educational program? yes no

## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY

1. Do you implement a: (circle one)

   Special Education Self-contained Program

   Special Education Resource Program

2. At what level do you teach?

   Primary Intermediate Junior High

3. Are any of your students mainstreamed into regular classes?

   Yes No

   If yes, how many of your students are mainstreamed? _____

4. How many regular teachers are working with your mainstreamed students?

   _____

5. Have you been able to communicate with regular teachers regarding the needs and progress of your mainstreamed special education students?

   Yes No

   If yes, please check the types of communication you have initiated this school year and how often they occurred.

   A. Have you shared materials for the special education students?

   _____weekly _____twice a month _____monthly

   _____more frequently than any of the above

   _____less frequently than any of the above

   B. Have you discussed techniques and methods for the special education students?

   _____weekly _____twice a month _____monthly

   _____more frequently than any of the above

   _____less frequently than any of the above

   C. Are the regular teachers present at the multi-disciplinary staffing of your mainstreamed students?

   _____all the time _____most of the time

   _____half of the time _____less than half the time

   _____never

D. Are the regular teachers present at the Annual Review of your mainstreamed students?

_____all the time _____most of the time

_____half of the time _____less than half the time

_____never

E. Do the regular teachers to whom you mainstream students participate in the development of:

a) Annual goals yes no

b) short-term objectives yes no

6. Have you been able to provide formal in-service training or workshops for the regular classroom teachers regarding

A. characteristics of handicapped children? yes no

_____number of presentations

B. development of annual goals and/or I.E.P.s.? yes no

_____number of presentations

C. development of short term instructional objectives and implementation strategies? yes no

_____number of presentations

7. Have you explained to the regular classroom teachers the special problems of the mainstreamed special education children in their classrooms? yes no

8. Have you provided the regular classroom teachers with the special education case study reports? yes no

9. Did you present the case study report to the teacher? yes no

10. Was the case study report available in the files? yes no

11. Have the regular classroom teachers sought help or information from you regarding the mainstreamed child's educational program? yes no